

House Republican Press Release

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Rep. Frey Backs Bill To Establish State Ethics Office



Hartford, CT- On Tuesday, May 31, State Rep. John H. Frey, R-Ridgefield, voted in favor of legislation that would establish a state Office of Ethics and Citizens Ethics Advisory Board. Senate Bill 1 was passed by the State Senate on June 4 and now goes to Governor M. Jodi Rell for final approval.

According to the non-partisan Office of Legislative Research (OLR), SB1 would abolish the state's current nine-member State Ethics Commission (SEC) and establish the Office of State Ethics (OSE) and a nine-member Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board as its successor. The advisory board would be located within the office, which is an independent state agency. It would require the governor, Senate president, and House speaker to jointly appoint an interim executive director to oversee the transfer of duties and responsibilities.

"The scandal surrounding Governor Rowland illustrated the need for serious ethics reform at the state level," said Rep. Frey, who serves as an Assistant Minority Leader. "In fact, even before that time, it was becoming clear that the current configuration of the state Ethics Commission could not properly address alleged ethical misconduct by state officials. I'm hopeful that replacing the commission with a completely new office, with better defined powers and structure, will help restore trust in state government."

Under SB1, the advisory board would perform the functions, which in practice, are currently performed by the nine-member SEC. The board must complete an annual written evaluation of the executive director's performance. The board may remove the executive director in accordance with the State Personnel Act and any applicable collective bargaining agreement.

Unlike current law, the bill clearly delineates the ethics responsibilities of the board as opposed to the staff of the OSE. The bill would organize the office into two divisions: legal and enforcement. The legal division would provide information and opinions to people subject to the code and to the public, gives the board legal advice on matters before it, and represents the board in matters where the board is a party. The enforcement division, headed by the ethics enforcement officer, would investigate complaints filed with the board or that the board initiates, review appeals from municipal ethics agencies' decisions, and advise the board on the merits of hearing each appeal.